

# A CLASSIFICATION OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES BASED ON SPEECH ACT THEORY

RICHARD A. YOUNG

*The assumption that the meaning of conditional sentences can be determined solely by surface structure features, such as tense, mood, and particles, severely restricts the exegetical task. The meaning of any utterance cannot be understood apart from the speaker's intent, the situational and linguistic context, as well as the linguistic form. Speech act theory provides objective criteria to help the exegete integrate these elements. When applied to conditional sentences, speech act theory yields more meaningful results than traditional approaches.*

\* \* \*

## INTRODUCTION

THE approach one takes to understand an utterance rests on underlying assumptions concerning how thoughts are communicated through language. Traditional approaches to Greek grammar have not yielded satisfactory results in classifying the meanings of conditional sentences. Greek rhetoricians debated the meaning of Greek conditional sentences.<sup>1</sup> In reference to conditional sentences, Robertson remarked, "In truth the doctors have disagreed themselves and the rest have not known how to go."<sup>2</sup> Blass and Debrunner observe, "The classical grammars are also hopelessly at variance."<sup>3</sup> Recent work, however, in linguistics and philosophy offer potential for a fresh understanding of Greek conditional sentences.

<sup>1</sup>Callimachus (*Epigrammatum Fragmenta* 393) remarks, "Even the crows on the rooftops are discussing the question as to which conditionals are true." Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Grammaticos* 309. For the debate see Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Dogmaticos* 2.112-23.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 1004.

<sup>3</sup>F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961) 189.

## TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Most modern grammarians of NT Greek follow Robertson's classification of conditional sentences.<sup>4</sup> Robertson essentially follows the system of Gildersleeve and Winer in identifying four classes of conditionals based on the surface structure phenomena of mood and tense.<sup>5</sup> Meanings are then assigned to each class.

The first class condition is identified by  $\epsilon\lambda$  with an indicative verb in the protasis and a verb of any tense and mood in the apodosis.<sup>6</sup> Because the first class uses the indicative mood (the mood of reality) in the protasis, it is commonly said to mean that the protasis is "determined as fulfilled." Robertson claims that the speaker assumes the reality of his premise. The premise may or may not be actually true. If the premise is objectively true, it may be rendered with "since." Otherwise the speaker is either falsely assuming the reality of the premise or assuming its reality for the sake of argument.

The second class condition is identified by an  $\epsilon\lambda$  with a secondary tense indicative mood verb in the protasis and the particle  $\alpha\upsilon$  (usually) with a secondary tense verb in the apodosis.<sup>7</sup> The second class condition is said to mean that the premise is determined as unfulfilled. The indicative is used because the speaker is of the persuasion that the premise (protasis) which he sets forth is contrary to fact. The premise may actually be contrary to fact (John 5:46), or it may be contrary to what the speaker believes to be the facts (Luke 7:39).

The third class condition is identified by  $\epsilon\lambda\upsilon$  with a subjunctive mood verb in the protasis and a verb with any tense and mood in the apodosis (usually present or future tense and indicative mood).<sup>8</sup> According to Robertson this construction means that the premise is undetermined but has a prospect of determination. Since the subjunc-

<sup>4</sup>Notable among modern grammarians who do not follow Robertson are C. F. D. Moule (*An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1968] 148-52), E. Burton (*Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898] 100-112), and W. LaSor (*Handbook of New Testament Greek* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973] 2.225).

<sup>5</sup>Robertson, *Grammar*, 1004-27.

<sup>6</sup>There are about 300 examples of this surface structure phenomenon in the NT. J. L. Boyer ("First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" *GTJ* 2 [1981] 75-114) counts 308 using GRAMCORD. It may be questionable whether all the examples that Boyer cites represent conditional sentences. J. W. Roberts ("Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences in the Greek New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 4 [1960] 72) counts 339.

<sup>7</sup>There are about 50 examples of this surface structure form in the NT. J. L. Boyer ("Second Class Conditions in New Testament Greek," *GTJ* 3 [1982] 81) counts 47. J. W. Roberts ("Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences," 72) counts 51.

<sup>8</sup>There are about 300 examples of this structure in the NT. J. L. Boyer ("Third [and Fourth] Class Conditions," *GTJ* 3 [1982] 163) counts 277. J. W. Roberts ("Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences," 72) counts 332.

tive is a mood of unreality or uncertainty, its use indicates that the premise has not yet become a reality. The third class is essentially a future condition. The speaker regards the premise as having a greater probability of becoming a reality than would have been true if he had used a fourth class condition, which uses the optative mood. The speaker does not assume the premise to be true or untrue.

The fourth class condition is identified by  $\epsilon\iota$  with an optative mood verb in the protasis and the particle  $\alpha\upsilon$  with an optative mood verb in the apodosis. No example of this construction exists in the NT having both the protasis and apodosis.<sup>9</sup> It is said that the premise of the fourth class condition is undetermined with remote prospect of determination. The fourth class condition is understood to indicate a future (undetermined) condition with a less probable chance of fulfillment than is true with a third class condition.

#### INADEQUACY OF THE TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING

The traditional approach to Greek conditionals is adequate for classifying the surface structure phenomena. It is inadequate, however, for describing the semantic range of conditional sentences. For example, in Luke 22:42 there is a first class condition: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me" (*NIV*). The premise is not true; it was the Father's will for Jesus to suffer. It cannot be said that Jesus assumes the truth of the premise for the sake of argument, for that understanding of the statement would result in a serious theological problem, namely, disunity in the Godhead. The other option, that Jesus falsely assumed the truth of the premise, is highly questionable. It could be said with Boyer<sup>10</sup> that first class conditions merely represent a simple if/then relation. Grammatically this is correct, but semantically it barely scratches the surface. What did Jesus mean by the utterance? Why did he say it?

In Gal 4:15 there is a second class condition: "If you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me" (*NIV*). The traditional interpretation (contrary-to-fact condition) would yield the following understanding: "If you could have done so (which for some reason you could not do), you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me (which of course you did not do because the premise was never realized)."<sup>11</sup> This is nothing more than

<sup>9</sup>Roberts ("Some Aspects of Conditional Sentences," 72) counts 12 examples of the partial construction in the NT, but Boyer ("Third [and Fourth] Class Conditions," 170) denies that any exist.

<sup>10</sup>Boyer, "First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" 81-82.

<sup>11</sup>Boyer ("Second Class Conditions in New Testament Greek," 83) explains the meaning of second class conditions by means of a similar expanded paraphrase. He remarks, "It states a condition which as a matter of fact has not been met and follows with a statement of what would have been true if it had."

a truism that does not say anything at all. The exegete must realize that the situation was emotionally charged and that Paul is expressing something more than meaningless double-talk.

The main cause for exegetical problems with the traditional approach stems from a simplistic view of semantics.<sup>12</sup> There is an overemphasis on a one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning, which does not fully recognize the semantic range of  $\epsilon\iota$  or that one type of condition may be represented by various surface structure forms. As observed in the above survey, conditional sentences are classified according to surface structure phenomena (mood and tense) and then a meaning is attached to each class.<sup>13</sup> The assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning is often violated in actual usage. Lexical forms usually have many meanings (e.g., the word "run"); likewise, grammatical constructions often have multiple meanings (e.g., the Greek genitive case). Any attempt to uncover the meaning of conditionals must be based on a more productive theory of semantics.

Furthermore, the traditional approach fails to recognize the role of the situational context in the communication act.<sup>14</sup> To interpret the meaning of language purely on the basis of its linguistic features is a

<sup>12</sup>"Semantics" as used here refers to the study of total meaning rather than the meaning of language structure. This includes the meaning of the propositional content of the linguistic structure, the propositional content of inferential material, and the intent of the speaker. Since these elements are necessary for understanding an utterance, they must be part of the study of total meaning. Semantics then will be used in its broadest sense and closely associated with the concept of understanding. For an extensive bibliography on semantics, see S. DeLancy and T. Payne, "Semantics Master Bibliography," *Notes on Linguistics* 37 (1987) 5-43.

<sup>13</sup>Some have rightly observed a semantic overlap between the four classes of conditions. For the similarity between a first class form in which the protasis is obviously false and a second class form see M. Winger ("Unreal Conditions in the Letters of Paul," *JBL* 105 [1986] 110-12). Winger (p. 111) states, "Grammarians generally agree that writers of ancient Greek—classical or Hellenistic—sometimes stated conditions they regarded as unreal without using secondary tenses or  $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ . Thus, the unreal *form* is only an option; any past or present condition may be unfulfilled, but the unreal condition is explicitly, and therefore emphatically, unfulfilled." Boyer ("First Class Conditions: What Do They Mean?" 76) isolated 36 first class examples from the NT in which the protasis was obviously false. Boyer correctly concluded that every sentence with a first class form will not fit the meaning attached to it by Robertson. Yet what Boyer does is simply to replace Robertson's meaning with another, retaining the one-to-one correspondence between form and meaning. Burton (*Moods and Tenses*, 104-5) argues that  $\epsilon\iota$  with the future tense conveys the same idea as  $\acute{\epsilon}\alpha\nu$  with the subjunctive. There are 22 examples of  $\epsilon\iota$  with the future tense in the NT.

<sup>14</sup>The context includes such things as the shared experience of the speaker and audience, the shared knowledge about the culture, the immediate situational setting, the prior statements of the same and related discussions, the relationship between speaker and audience, the formality of the situation, and the social register of the speaker and hearer.

basic fallacy that grammarians are prone to make. Situational context influences the meaning of an utterance in two ways. (1) Speakers often allow the context to communicate part of their message for them. Why say something that is obvious and insult your audience's intelligence? As in most forms of human behavior, there is a principle of least effort. People say just enough to be understood in light of the situation. They allow the audience to compare what was said with the context and to draw the proper inference, thereby arriving at the intended meaning. The speaker may leave part of his propositional content or his intent to be inferred by his audience. (2) The speaker may be influenced by pragmatic concerns and modify how he says something. Sometimes a conditional construction is used as a politeness marker when requesting a superior to do something: "If you wouldn't mind . . .," or "If you would be willing. . ." This interaction between linguistic form and situational context implies that the linguistic form cannot be adequately explained apart from considering the communication situation. How much is actually said and how it is said will depend on various pragmatic factors, such as formality and social register.

Little attention has been given to indirect utterances and the distinction between propositional meaning and use. A speaker may be influenced by pragmatic concerns to the extent that he will use a surface structure phenomenon in a way that is alien to its literal meaning.<sup>15</sup> If a wife makes the statement, "The car is dirty," and her husband replies, "You're right," and then continues to read the sports page, he is likely to exasperate his poor wife. Her utterance was not really a statement, it was a request. Indirect speech acts still retain their literal meaning. The car is indeed dirty. The wife, however, meant not only what she said, but something else in addition. The questions that concern the semanticist are, "What were the pragmatic influences that caused her to express her desires in the form of a statement?" "Is it possible to develop criteria or rules to define such use of language and to recover the speaker's intent?"<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Common examples of disjunction between meaning and use would be idioms, figures of speech, and one part of speech used for another. More relevant to our study of conditional sentences is where one type of sentence is used for another. Questions are often equivalent to statements. For example, "What shall it profit a man . . .?" (Matt 16:26). No answer is expected, rather, it is a rhetorical question that conveys an emphatic negative assertion, "It will surely not profit a man. . . ." Questions can be used for commands or request, "Will you please close the door?" or "Can you pass the salt?" In the latter, the ability of the person addressed is hardly the issue. Statements may be used for commands, "It's rather drafty in here" could mean "Please close the window."

<sup>16</sup>R. A. Jacob and P. S. Rosenbaum (*Transformations, Style, and Meaning* [New York: Wiley, 1971] 1) state, "No one knows the exact nature of the relationship

There needs to be more attention given to a speaker's intent when interpreting what any utterance means. Both the propositional content of what is said and how the speaker uses the words have direct bearing on the proper understanding of an utterance. If a hearer simply decodes the propositional content in the question "Can you pass the salt?" he might respond with an affirmative answer rather than the desired action. He would not have understood what was said because he did not consider the intent of the speaker. The goal of biblical exegesis is to understand what the writers of Scripture said; this cannot be done by viewing the text (on any level) apart from the intent of the author/speaker.

Semantics is perhaps the least precise and most difficult subdivision of language study. The reason for this is that there are a great number of factors involved in the meaning of human communication, such as the intent of the author, the situational context, shared knowledge, the words used, the arrangement of the words, the inflection of the voice, discourse features such as prominence and structure, the attitude of the speaker, and the relation of the speaker to the audience. There is much more involved in meaning than simply linguistic phenomena. The questions are how do all these factors interact and is it possible to devise a theory of meaning that takes everything into account?

#### A NEW APPROACH: IMPLICATURE AND SPEECH ACT THEORY<sup>17</sup>

The theory of "implicature" was proposed by Grice in a series of lectures at Harvard in 1967.<sup>18</sup> Grice recognized that the meaning of communication is dependent not simply on what is said, but also on what is implicated (implied). He distinguished between the inferences that one could possibly draw from an utterance and the inferences

---

between form and meaning. . . . One of the major goals of linguistics, perhaps the major one, is to make this relationship explicit."

<sup>17</sup>The theory of implicature and speech act theory are subdivisions of the study of pragmatics. Pragmatics is broadly defined as the study of language usage. It is concerned with the relation between context and language and how language usage affects language structure; cf. S. C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1983) 5-35.

<sup>18</sup>His work has only been partially published; see H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in P. Cole and J. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3, *Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975) 41-58. A recent development of Grice's theory is relevance theory; cf. D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); D. Sperber and D. Wilson, "An Outline of Relevance Theory," *Notes on Linguistics* 39 (1987) 5-24; Ernst-August Gutt, "Unravelling Meaning: An Introduction to Relevance Theory," *Notes on Translation* 112 (April 1986) 10-20; and Ernst-August Gutt, "What is the Meaning We Translate," *Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics* 1 (1987) 31-58.

that the speaker intended. The latter he called implicatures.<sup>19</sup> This concept arose out of five principles (or rules) that he formulated by which efficient, rational, and cooperative use of language is achieved.<sup>20</sup> Since meaning is conveyed through both the linguistic activity and the situational context, it follows that there is more communicated than what is said. "The words and sentences on the page are reliable clues, but they cannot be the total picture. The more pressing question is how the texts function in human interaction."<sup>21</sup>

Two pioneers of speech act theory are J. L. Austin<sup>22</sup> and John R. Searle.<sup>23</sup> Their basic thesis is that people actually perform acts by using speech patterns. Austin begins by saying that there are a number of utterances that are not reports about reality and therefore not subject to being true or false. Instead, these utterances are actions (e.g., "I name this ship Queen Elizabeth," or "I bet you a dollar it will rain tomorrow"). By making the utterance the speaker is actually performing the action. Such use of language is termed "performative." Thus, Austin theorizes, language may be used either to say something about reality (constative utterance) or to do something (performative utterance).<sup>24</sup>

Often the performative will be marked in the surface structure by a definite formula: the first person singular pronoun, the present tense, and a performative verb, such as promise, warn, thank, command, congratulate, or apologize.<sup>25</sup> Other times it will not be overtly

<sup>19</sup>Distinction should also be made between Grice's concept of conversational implicature and logical implication, which is based solely on semantic content.

<sup>20</sup>These principles are as follows: (1) The Cooperative Principle: the participants' contributions are in keeping with the common purpose or direction of the exchange; (2) The Principle of Quality: the participants do not normally say things they know to be false; (3) The Principle of Quantity: the participants' contribution is only as informative as required by the purposes of the exchange; (4) The Principle of Relevance: the participants' contributions are relevant to the discussion; and (5) The Principle of Manner: the participants normally attempt to be brief and orderly, avoiding obscurity and ambiguity. See Grice, "Logic and Conversation," 45-47.

<sup>21</sup>R. de Beaugrande and W. Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (New York: Longman, 1981) 3. They go on to say (p. 35) that a text is the result of an unconscious process of decision and selection which cannot be interpreted in isolation from those factors that were involved in its formation. "We must constantly seek to discover and systemize the motivations and strategies according to which the creation and utilization of texts are kept in operation."

<sup>22</sup>J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University, 1962).

<sup>23</sup>John R. Searle, *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Cambridge University, 1969).

<sup>24</sup>Austin himself came to reject this distinction since even statements about reality can be expressed using a performative verb, "I hereby state that X." Thus all utterances are performatives.

<sup>25</sup>Austin (*How to Do Things with Words*, 149) claimed that there are over a thousand such words in English. If a verb could collocate with the word "hereby" ("I

marked in the surface structure. For example, "Can you pass the salt?" would be the implicit form of "I request that you pass me the salt."<sup>26</sup> Thus, there are two categories of performatives: explicit performatives (marked in surface structure by standard formula) and implicit performatives (not marked in surface structure by standard formula).<sup>27</sup>

Performatives can carry a certain force (rebuke, warning, etc.) or can achieve a certain effect (conviction, persuasion, etc.). The first is called an illocutionary act (e.g., "He urged me to shoot her") and the second is called a perlocutionary act (e.g., "He persuaded me to shoot her"). If an illocutionary act fulfills all its necessary conditions, it will produce in the hearer a recognition of the intent of the utterance.

In order for communication to be effective, the speaker must get the hearer to recognize the intent of his utterance. This may be accomplished in several ways—which one the speaker chooses depends on situational factors. He may indicate his intent in a conventional manner by (1) the standard formula, (2) a recognized device in the surface structure other than the standard formula,<sup>28</sup> (3) a sentence-type that represents a certain illocutionary force,<sup>29</sup> or in a nonconven-

hereby promise that X"), it was deemed a performative verb. Austin then used his collection of verbs as the basis for classifying speech act types into five groups. However, it is Searle's classification of speech act types which is more commonly accepted today, but even his scheme is not without opponents. According to Searle (*Expression and Meaning* [New York: Cambridge University, 1979] 1-29) there are five types of utterances: (1) assertives, which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (e.g., assert, conclude, affirm); (2) directives by which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something (e.g., request, question); (3) commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g., promise, offer); (4) expressives, which express a psychological state (e.g., thanking, apologizing); and (5) declarations, which affect immediate changes in the state of affairs (e.g., declaring war, christening, excommunicating). B. Fraser ("Hedged Performatives" in Cole and Morgan, *Speech Acts*, 187-210) groups speech acts into eight categories based on speaker's intent.

<sup>26</sup>Some suggest that implicit performatives are merely idioms. Levinson (*Pragmatics*, 268-70) argues to the contrary. Among his reasons are: (1) indirect speech acts may be responded to literally, indicating that they retain their literal meaning (e.g., "Can you pass the salt?" "Yes I can, here it is"); and (2) many indirect speech acts can be transferred literally into another language since the principles of their formation are not language specific.

<sup>27</sup>All implicit performatives can be expressed explicitly with the formula "I (hereby) V<sub>p</sub> (you) (that) S," where V<sub>p</sub> is a performative verb and S is an embedded sentence.

<sup>28</sup>Levinson (*Pragmatics*, 233) observes that the force of implicit performatives could be indicated by mood ("Shut the door" rather than "I order you to shut the door"), particles ("Therefore, X" rather than "I conclude that X"), adverbs ("I'll be there without fail" rather than "I promise that I will be there"), and even intonation of voice ("It's going to change" rather than "I state [or question] that it's going to change").

<sup>29</sup>The interrogative sentence is normally associated with the act of questioning, an imperative with commanding, and a declarative with stating. Yet this correspondence is

TABLE I  
*Necessary Conditions for Requests and Assertions*<sup>a</sup>

<i>Conditions</i>	<i>Requests</i>	<i>Assertions</i>
Propositional Content	Future act of hearer	Any proposition
Preparatory	Speaker believes hearer can do act It is not obvious that hearer would do act without being asked	Speaker has evidence for the truth of proposition It is not obvious to speaker that hearer knows proposition
Sincerity	Speaker wants hearer to do act	Speaker believes proposition
Essential	Counts as an attempt to get hearer to do act	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that proposition represents an actual state of affairs

<sup>a</sup>Adapted from Searle, *Speech Acts*, 66-67.

tional manner by (4) framing his words in such a way (without any commonly recognized surface structure marker) so that the audience can make the proper inferences. The first would be a direct speech act; the other three would be indirect speech acts.

By avoiding the standard illocutionary force marker a speaker can soften an otherwise harsh performative ("Can you pass the salt?" instead of "I request you to pass me the salt"). It is probable that speakers of Koine Greek used conditional sentences to tone down the force of certain acts such as rebuke or request. When Martha rebuked the Lord for not being there to prevent Lazarus from dying, she used the form of a conditional sentence: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:21). If Martha's utterance is analyzed according to the traditional understanding of second class conditions, her intention will not be understood.

If some performatives are not marked in the surface structure by the standard formula, there needs to be some criteria for exegetes to determine what type is taking place. Searle argues that speech acts "are performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements."<sup>30</sup> He devised a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for speech acts to be successfully performed in a given utterance (see Table).

not strictly observed. For example, the explicit performative "I request that you close the door" could be communicated with an interrogative ("Can you close the door?"), an imperative ("Close the door"), or a declarative ("I would be very happy if you'd close the door"). Some would classify sentence types that are recognized as expressing a certain performative act as explicit rather than implicit performatives (e.g., imperatives for expressing a command).

<sup>30</sup>Searle, *Speech Acts*, 16.

From his conditions, Searle derived a set of rules for the use of the illocutionary force indicator.<sup>31</sup> He has since modified his theory to accommodate Grice's theory of implicature by adding criteria to help determine the illocutionary force of indirect speech acts, e.g., to determine when the speaker is asking the hearer to pass him the salt and when he is merely concerned with the hearer's ability to do so. After analyzing various indirect requests, Searle proposed the following generalizations: (1) a speaker can make an indirect request by either stating that or asking if the propositional content condition concerning the future act of the hearer is in effect (e.g., "Do you have change for a dollar?"). (2) A speaker can make an indirect request by either stating that or asking if the preparatory condition concerning the hearer's ability to do an act has efficacy (e.g., "Can you pass the salt?"). (3) A speaker can make an indirect request by stating that (not asking if) the sincerity condition concerning his desire to the hearer to do an act is true (e.g., "I wish you wouldn't do that"). (4) A speaker can make an indirect request by either stating that or asking if there are sufficient reasons for doing an act (e.g., "You had better go now"). (5) A speaker can make an indirect request by asking if the hearer wants to do an act (e.g., "Would you like to go to the store?").<sup>32</sup>

Indirect speech acts which are constructed by questioning or stating one of the necessary conditions are called conventional. Some, however, do not follow this pattern; e.g., "Boy, I'm starving" can be used for a request. Such nonconventional indirect speech acts seemingly violate Grice's principles of communication and place the burden on the hearer to make the proper inference.

The hearer can usually discern that an utterance is a certain type of performative by inference from what was said in light of the context.<sup>33</sup> For example, the utterance "There is a bull in the field" could either be a simple remark or a warning. It all depends on which

<sup>31</sup>Rules for the illocutionary force indicating device of a request are as follows. (1) The Propositional Content Rule: the request is to be uttered only in the context of a sentence or longer stretch of discourse. The utterance predicates a future act of the hearer. (2) The First Preparatory Rule: the request is to be uttered only if the speaker believes the hearer can do the act. (3) The Second Preparatory Rule: the request is to be uttered only if it is not obvious that the hearer would do the act without being asked. (4) The Sincerity Rule: the request is to be uttered only if the speaker wants the hearer to do the act. (5) The Essential Rule: the utterance of the request counts as an attempt to get the hearer to do the act. See Searle, *Speech Acts*, 62-63.

<sup>32</sup>John R. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts," in Cole and Morgan, *Speech Acts*, 59-82. The essay was reprinted in Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 30-57.

<sup>33</sup>Searle (*Expression and Meaning*, 32) states, "In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer."

side of the fence the person being addressed is standing! In the same way one can infer from the context and what was said that Martha's utterance (John 11:21) has the illocutionary force of a rebuke.

Basically there are two elements involved in understanding an utterance: (1) the propositional meaning, or what was said, and (2) the intent of the speaker, or why it was said (the illocutionary force).<sup>34</sup> In some cases the two elements are not detachable; the propositional content includes the force indicating device. If the fellow picking daisies on the other side of the fence recognized only the propositional meaning of "There is a bull in the field," he would probably end up being gored. He may have been able to parse every word and to look up the meanings in a lexicon, but he would have failed to understand because he missed the intent. Both elements should be recognized as an interconnected unit. Illocutionary force then is an aspect of meaning that can be described in terms of conditions or rules. Propositional content conveys what is being said, and the illocutionary force conveys how it is to be taken. To understand the statements in Scripture, exegetes must be sensitive not only to the propositional meaning but also to devices that mark illocutionary force.

#### ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONAL SENTENCES

Speech act theory categorizes utterances according to function rather than form. There is greater exegetical and homiletical value in classifying conditionals in this way, for it brings the interpreter closer to the speaker's intent. When viewed through the speech act model, all conditionals are seen as implicit performatives which are used to do something in addition to stating a condition; i.e., to persuade the listener, to make a strong assertion, to manipulate the listener, to give an exhortation, to express a respectful rebuke, to ask something in a polite way, to justify one's self, to mock someone, or to convey a lament. Pragmatic reasons cause a speaker to use a conditional instead of a more direct expression. The following is a partial classification of conditionals on the basis of function.

#### *Rebuke*

To soften a rebuke and make it more respectful, it may be cloaked in a conditional sentence or some other rhetorical device. Shakespeare has said, "Your 'if' is the only peacemaker; much virtue

<sup>34</sup>Searle (*Intentionality* [New York: Cambridge University, 1983] 27), in discussing the relation between illocutionary force and intentionality, states, "To characterize them [utterances] as beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires is already to ascribe intentionality to them."

in 'if'."<sup>35</sup> The necessary conditions (in terms of Searle's theory) for a rebuke are that the hearer performed an act in the past (propositional condition), the speaker does not believe that the act was in his best interest (preparatory condition), the act angered the speaker (sincerity condition), and the speaker intends his expression as a reprimand (essential condition). Indirect rebukes may be made by questioning or stating any one of the above conditions. For example, a speaker may question why the hearer did an act ("Why didn't you get the car fixed?"), or he may state that an act was not in his best interest ("You sure got us in a jam this time"). A speaker may combine the propositional content with what would have been in his best interest ("If you had gotten the car fixed, we wouldn't be stranded out in the middle of nowhere").

An example of a conditional sentence used as a rebuke is found in John 11:21, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."<sup>36</sup> A number of factors were involved in the formation of Martha's utterance. Her brother had just died. She was in deep sorrow and perhaps angered that Jesus had not been there to heal Lazarus's sickness. Martha was not in the frame of mind to begin a discourse in logic with her teacher. The sight of Jesus only caused her emotions to become more agitated. This charged emotional state then surfaced in a rebuke. The most important factor involved in the formation of Martha's utterance was the social register between her and Jesus. She was his devoted follower, having great respect and admiration for him as her teacher. The last thing she would want to do is to offend him. Because of this, she softened her rebuke by avoiding the illocutionary force marker and framing it in the form of a conditional sentence. The explicit form would have been, "I hereby rebuke you for not being here and preventing my brother from dying."

### *Lament*

Consider the statement, "If my husband were still alive, I would be so happy." If it is not known that the husband is dead, the speaker is expressing hope; if it is known that the husband is dead, the speaker is expressing a lament. The protasis of a conditional used to express a lament is contrary to fact. About one-fourth of the so-called second class conditionals in the NT express lament. The necessary

<sup>35</sup> *As You Like It*, V.iv.108.

<sup>36</sup> This was the initial statement that both Mary and Martha made when they saw Jesus (John 11:21, 32). Mary's utterance, however, could be a lament. Since most of the necessary conditions for a rebuke and lament are the same, many of their indirect forms could be constructed in the same way. The observation that Mary fell down at Jesus' feet and wept suggests that her utterance was a lament rather than a rebuke.

conditions for a lament are that an event happened in the past (propositional condition), the speaker does not believe that the event (which he believes to have occurred) was in the best interest of himself or the hearer (preparatory condition), the speaker is grieved because of the event (sincerity condition), and the speaker counts his utterance as expressing sorrow (necessary condition). Indirect laments may be conveyed by stating the event the speaker would like to have happened (e.g., "I wish that John had not gotten aboard flight 256" or "If John had taken another flight, he would still be with us").

In Matt 11:21 a conditional is used to express a lament: "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." The explicit form of the lament is "I hereby lament that you did not repent as Tyre and Sidon would have because of the miracles you saw."

### *Argue*

The illocutionary act of arguing (i.e., an attempt by a speaker to persuade the hearer to accept his opinion) is very common in conditionals. Two rules of inference are involved in the use of conditionals for arguing (these rules will be illustrated by the conditional statement, "If I get my car fixed, then I will come to see you"). *Modus ponens* (method of affirming) is used to argue that the consequent is true by affirming the antecedent ("I fixed my car. Therefore, I will come to see you"). *Modus tollens* (method of denial) is used to argue that the antecedent is false by denying the consequent ("I did not come to see you. Therefore, I did not get my car fixed"). No valid conclusion can be drawn regarding the consequent by denying the antecedent ("I did not get my car fixed. I may or may not come to see you depending on whether I can get another ride") or regarding the antecedent by affirming the consequent ("I came to see you. I may or may not have fixed my car. Actually, someone else gave me a ride"). Thus, in order for a conditional to be used to argue a point, both parties must agree that the "if" clause is true or the "then" clause is false.<sup>37</sup> The point of agreement does not need to be asserted in the text; it may be understood from the context.

An example of a first class conditional used for a *modus tollens* argument is found in Matt 12:26: καὶ εἰ ὁ Σατανᾶς τὸν Σατανᾶν ἐκβάλλει, ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν ἐμερίσθη / 'And if Satan casts out Satan, he is

<sup>37</sup>Cf. I. Copi, *Introduction to Logic* (New York: Macmillan, 1961) 274-77. Some of the ideas in this section have been adapted from J. K. Baima, "Making Valid Conclusions from Greek Conditional Sentences" (Th.M. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1986).

divided against himself'. It is clear from the following rhetorical question ("How then will his kingdom stand?") that the consequent is false. Satan's kingdom does stand and he is not divided against himself. Since the consequent is false, then the antecedent must also be false. Jesus, then, is arguing that Satan does not cast out Satan. He is not merely assuming the verity of the antecedent for the sake of argument (in which case his own position would be indeterminate); he is arguing for its falsity. This then becomes the basis for the rest of the argument of the passage (Matt 12:27-28).

A second class conditional using the *modus tollens* form of argument is found in Luke 7:39: Οὗτος εἰ ἦν προφήτης, ἐγίνωσκεν ἂν τίς καὶ ποταπὴ ἢ γυνὴ ἣτις ἅπτεται αὐτοῦ / 'If this man were a prophet he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner' (Luke 7:39, *NIV*). Robertson states, "The Pharisee here assumed that Jesus is not a prophet because he allowed the sinful woman to wash his feet."<sup>38</sup> The pharisee, however, was not merely assuming the case, he was convinced that Jesus was not a prophet. By denying the consequent ("Jesus does not know what kind of woman is touching him"), the pharisee was seeking to persuade the others that Jesus was not a prophet.

Many first class conditions use *modus ponens* to argue for the truth of the consequent. The truth of the antecedent is often clearly the point of agreement and thus not explicitly affirmed. In such cases, εἰ may be translated "since." For example, in Rom 3:29-30 Paul argues that the Jews do not have sole claim on God: "Since God is indeed one, then he is God of the Gentiles as well." Paul used the common agreement regarding the unity of God to argue for the truth of the consequence.

### *Request*

Sometimes a speaker will frame a request or command in the form of a conditional sentence for the sake of being polite. An employee would not barge into his boss's office and bluntly demand a raise. Rather, he would soften his request with "If you would consider" or the like. The "if" clause is a mitigator or politeness marker.

There is a polarity between being direct (i.e., "I command you to pass me the salt" or "Give me the salt") and being polite (i.e., "Can you pass the salt" or "If you wouldn't mind, I would like some salt"). A speaker would tend toward politeness if the situation is formal, the social status of the hearer is above that of the speaker, there are others listening, the hearer is in close proximity to the speaker, or if the speaker desires the conversation to continue. The demands for politeness usually supersede the need for clarity.

An example of a conditional used for a request is found in Matt 17:4: εἰ θέλεις, ποιήσω ὧδε τρεῖς σκηνάς / 'If you wish, I will put up three shelters' (*NIV*). The impetuous Peter might normally have blurted, out, "Let me put up three shelters." But the awe of the situation—seeing Jesus in his radiant splendor conversing with Moses and Elijah—led Peter to frame his request in a politer form using a conditional.

Jesus' request in the garden of Gethsemane ("If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me" [Matt 26:39; cf. Luke 22:42 and Mark 14:36]) is perplexing. One line of reasoning argues that the "if" clause introduces an indirect request asking whether the preparatory condition of the hearer's ability to do the requested act has efficacy. The utterance would then be after the analogy of "Can you pass the salt?" The sincerity of the request is explained by saying that the belief that the act was possible arose from the human nature of Jesus, which was not yet in perfect harmony with the desire of the Father. This disharmony perhaps was due to a temptation to avoid the path of suffering, but nevertheless, it is said, Jesus recognizes the impossibility of circumventing the cross in his second prayer, "If (since) it is not possible . . ." (Matt 26:42) and accepts the will of his Father. Such a line of interpretation does not do justice to the hypostatic union between the divine and human in Jesus. A second line of reasoning understands the "if" clause as an expressive, not a directive. That is, the "if" clause expresses a condition necessary for the hearer to perform the requested act, but both the hearer and the speaker realize that the "if" clause is impossible (i.e., false). In such a situation, the conditional makes no logical sense (see the discussion of conditionals used to argue above), but makes perfect sense if it is understood as expressing the speaker's feelings or needs. For example, if a boy had a particular dislike for a certain girl, he might say to his friend, "If you give me a million dollars, I'll ask her out for a date." Both he and his friend realize that the friend does not have a million dollars; thus the speaker is not questioning the hearer's ability to meet a necessary condition (he already knows that he cannot meet the condition) but is using a conditional form to express his aversion to dating that particular girl. Thus, Matt 26:39 can be understood not as a request that the immutable God reverse one of his eternal decrees, but as expressing the agony Jesus felt as he faced the cross event.

### *Assert*

The necessary conditions for an assertion are the same as for an argument except that the assertion is not an attempt to convince the hearer of a proposition. Assertions are recognized in conditionals

when the "then" clause does not follow logically the "if" clause.<sup>39</sup> For example, in the sentence "If Hitler was a military genius, then I'm a monkey's uncle," the consequence is so obviously false that the sentence is in fact a strong negative assertion - "Hitler was in no way a military genius." Most uses of conditionals in the NT for assertion are a form of Hebraic oath in which only the "if" clause is stated; the "then" clause is omitted because the conclusion is unthinkable or abominable.

An example of a conditional used to make an assertion is found in Mark 8:12: εἰ δοθήσεται τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ σημεῖον. A literal translation would be, "If a sign will be given to this generation. . . ." An idiomatic translation that captures the illocutionary force of the speaker would be, "A sign will not be given to this generation." Asseverations marked by aposiopesis, such as Mark 8:12, most likely reflect Semitic influence. Mark, however, made no attempt to explain the Semitism to his Roman audience as he does on other occasions. The apparent acceptance of this Semitism into Greek supports the contention that the formation of indirect speech acts is not entirely language specific, the syntax being understood across language boundaries. Robertson remarked that his construction is "not un-Greek in itself."<sup>40</sup> Other examples of this construction are OT quotations (e.g., Heb 3:11, 4:3, 4:5).<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>K. Sorensen ("Asseverative *IF* and its Congeners," *English Studies* 59 [1978] 248) remarks that these conditionals "are assertions that operate under cover of logic."

<sup>40</sup>Robertson, *Grammar*, 1024.

<sup>41</sup>A milder form of assertion employs a concession or contraexpectation relation between the two propositions (perhaps they could be called acts of maintaining). The speaker states a contrary thesis and then maintains his position in spite of it. Even though this relation may be conveyed by a first class form (using εἰ, εἰ καὶ, or εἴτε), the subordinate clause does not stipulate a condition (e.g. "Although all will be offended in you, I will never be offended" [Matt 26:33]). Burton (*Moods and Tenses*, 112) argues that such sentences should not be regarded as conditionals, saying "The force of a concessive sentence is thus very different from that of a conditional sentence. The latter represents the fulfilment of the apodosis as conditioned on the fulfilment of the protasis; the former represents the apodosis as fulfilled in spite of the fulfilment of the protasis." J. H. Greenlee ("IF in the New Testament," *TBT* 13 [1962] 42-43) agrees, saying, "Whereas a conditional clause sets up a condition favorable to the occurrence of an event, a clause of concession sets up a condition which is affirmed to be inadequate to bring about the event." Nelson Goodman (*Fact, Fiction, & Forecast* [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1955] 15) argues that semifactuals ("even if" clauses) do not assert a causal connection between the antecedent and consequent; rather they deny that such a relation exists. The idea of connection is a basic element in real conditions. J. Haiman ("Conditionals are Topics," *Language* 54 [1978] 579) observes that some logicians and linguists "deny that semifactuals are conditionals at all—regardless of their superficial morphological similarity to true conditionals." The question, however, is really one of definition. Haiman (564) remarks, "Until a satisfactory definition for a category exists, the sole criterion for identification of its supposed

### *Manipulate*

A speaker may use a conditional to manipulate the listener. A manipulation is an attempt to get someone to do something that he normally would not do or thinks is wrong (e.g., "If you won't be a good boy, Santa won't come"). The necessary conditions for the performance of a manipulation are that the hearer perform a future act (propositional condition), the hearer is able to do the act, but it is not obvious to the speaker that the hearer is willing to perform the act (preparatory condition), the speaker wants the hearer to perform the act (sincerity condition), and the speaker counts his utterance as an attempt to force the hearer to perform the act (essential condition). Indirect manipulations may be performed by questioning the hearer's ability to do an act ("You cannot do . . .") or by questioning the hearer's character ("If you're a man, you would . . .").

An example of a conditional used for manipulation is found in Matt 4:3: Εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰπὲ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἄρτοι γένωνται / 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread'. If a command is found in the consequent, then the truth value of the antecedent is dependent upon the response. If Jesus obeyed, making the consequent true, nothing could be said regarding the truth value of the antecedent. If, however, he did not obey, making the consequent false, then by *modus tollens* the antecedent is also false—a denial of his own deity. To escape Satan's trap, Jesus responded by saying that obedience is due God rather than to his tempter. Satan is not merely assuming the premise to be true, he is using Jesus' character as a leverage to force him to do something.<sup>42</sup> Other examples of manipulation are found in John 19:12 and Phlm 17.

### *Exhort*

An exhortation is an attempt to urge a hearer to do something he recognizes is proper. It differs from a manipulation in the preparatory and necessary conditions; it is not obvious to the speaker that the hearer would do the act without being encouraged, and it counts as an attempt to urge the hearer to perform the act. Exhortations

---

members is common superficial form: in the case of conditional clauses, the presence, in English, of a common conjunction *if*; in other languages, of a corresponding conjunction, word-order, verbal desinence, or whatever." Exegetical precision calls for a definition of conditionals based on the logical relations between propositions and on the speaker's usage, rather than solely on form.

<sup>42</sup>It is obvious that Satan was attempting to force Jesus to do something that he would never otherwise do (obey him rather than the Father). As such it is classified as a manipulation rather than an exhortation. However, the question remains whether εἰ

may be strengthened by stating the reason the act should be done. Among the ways a causal relation can be formed in Greek is by using the conjunction εἰ. Such usage should not be considered conditional.

An example of an exhortation is found in 1 John 4:11: Ἀγαπῆτοί, εἰ οὕτως ὁ θεὸς ἠγάπησεν ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὀφείλομεν ἀλλήλους ἀγαπᾶν / 'Beloved, since God so loved us, we also should love one another'. Exhortations are also found in John 13:14 and Col 3:1. The matrix clause may contain an imperative, a statement using "ought," or a rhetorical question which can be interpreted as an imperative (e.g., Luke 12:26).

### *Mock*

Sometimes a person will boast about being correct and mock or deride another for being wrong. This ridicule is made even more pointed when it is constructed in the form of a conditional sentence. The conditions necessary for the performance of a mockery are that the hearer has performed a past act or made a proposition (propositional condition), the hearer believes the act was right or the proposition true (preparatory condition), but the speaker believes the act was wrong or the proposition false (sincerity condition), and the speaker counts his utterance as an attempt to ridicule the hearer (necessary condition).

An example of mockery is found in Matt 27:40: Εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, κατὰβηθι ἀπο τοῦ σταυροῦ / 'If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'. The scorners were certainly not trying to manipulate Jesus to come down from the cross (they did not believe that he could). Instead, they were deriding Jesus for his "false assessment" of who he was and asserting that they were right all along—the fact that he was hanging helpless on the cross proves for them that they were correct; he cannot be the Son of God. For other examples of mockery see Matt 27:43; Luke 23:35, 37.

### CONCLUSION

Speech act theory has called attention to the function of an utterance in human communication and to the necessity of considering both the propositional meaning and speaker's intent when interpreting what any given communication means.<sup>43</sup> The speaker's intent

---

should be rendered "since" or "if". "Since" would indicate that Satan is manipulating by flattery; "if" would indicate that Satan is manipulating by *modus tollens*. Both types of manipulation are performed by questioning the hearer's character or ability. The hearer is being forced to comply in order to vindicate his reputation. The latter, however, is much more forceful and is, therefore, probably the force Satan intended.

<sup>43</sup>Speech act theory lends substantial weight to Hirsch's contention that the text is not autonomous from the speaker's intent (E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation*

can be detected from surface structure markings or by the interaction of the surface structure and situational context. This latter observation forces the exegete to integrate the total context (situational as well as linguistic) into his grammatical and lexical analysis at all levels.

Analyzing conditionals in light of speech act theory can be a useful tool to bring the exegete nearer to the intended meaning of the speaker/author and to resolve exegetical problems. The analysis of conditionals in light of mood, tense, and particles is not wrong, but it only examines part of what contributes to meaning. Viewing a problem from different angles usually results in a clearer understanding. It is like taking pictures of different sides of a building. A picture of the front of the building may be an accurate representation, but it cannot provide the viewer with an understanding of the whole (How long is the building? Is there a back porch?). Analyzing conditionals in light of speech act theory simply takes another picture of the problem from a different angle, augmenting the understanding based on traditional grammar.

One purpose of this paper has been to question the prevailing assumption that the linguistic form of a conditional sentence (i.e., tense, mood, and particles) is the sole criteria to ascertain meaning. This has been the approach of most previous work on conditionals. Perhaps the reason for the prevalence of this assumption is that Greek studies have traditionally been confined to linguistic features. Those who have passed through traditional instruction, therefore, have a tendency to equate propositional meaning with total meaning.

Further studies could be made in several areas. First, more precise categories and criteria will enhance the accuracy of the results and eliminate some subjectivity. For example, what determines that an utterance fits the criteria for a certain illocutionary act when exactly the same words are said (as in the case of Mary and Martha in John 11:21, 32)? To say that Martha's utterance was a rebuke and that Mary's was a lament when they say exactly the same thing must rest entirely on the exegete's analysis of the total context, including the actions of the speakers and hearers when the utterances were made. For example, a rebuke is rarely given when a person is bowing down before another and weeping (as Mary was). Mary's posture reflects her being deeply grieved rather than resentful and angry.

The various aspects of the total context must be evaluated in terms of how they influence the necessary conditions for a particular speech act (the propositional, preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions). A rebuke and lament differ mainly in the sincerity and

---

[New Haven: Yale University, 1967]). The theory demonstrates that the speaker's intent is inseparably linked with both the surface structure and the situational context.

essential conditions. The reason their indirect forms can be expressed with identical surface structure phenomena is because the propositional (a past act of the hearer or a past event) and preparatory (the speaker believes the past act or event was not in his best interest) conditions are very similar. The sincerity condition reflects an inner disposition or emotion which often surfaces in observable actions. These actions, for the most part, are not consciously performed, yet they do convey a certain emotional state. The sincerity condition for a rebuke (the speaker is angered because of an act) might be revealed by voice inflection and increased volume, rapidity of speech, short choppy phrases, or tension and rigidity of body. The sincerity condition for a lament (the speaker feels grieved because of an event) could be discerned from weeping, solitude, bowing the head, or a quiet, broken voice. None of the behavior patterns for a lament were observed in connection with Martha's utterance, but two accompanied Mary's. It is only on such a basis that a difference in meaning can be determined when the propositional content is identical.

The essential condition reflects an attempt to communicate a certain disposition or intent. The behavior patterns associated with the essential condition, therefore, are more deliberate than those associated with the sincerity condition. Circumstances accompanying a rebuke might include the speaker being in close proximity to the hearer, the speaker leaning forward, a characteristic facial expression, or short quick gestures with the lower arm and hand. A rebuke is more confrontational than a lament. Actions in the ancient Jewish culture that help to convey a lament include beating the breast, rending one's garments, lifting one's hands, fasting, dressing in black garments, going barefoot, removing ornaments from one's attire, sitting among ashes or sprinkling ashes on oneself, or public wailing. The expression of a rebuke involves retaliative behavior against an offender instead of outbursts of undirected energy, as with a lament. Martha's meeting with Jesus was more confrontational, thereby suggesting that she was rebuking him.

The above represents suggestions for integrating the situational context with the propositional content to arrive at the speaker's meaning. All of the behavior patterns mentioned, whether consciously or unconsciously performed, are modes of communication. Since they contribute to the total meaning, they cannot be ignored by the exegete. Of course, some behavior patterns cannot be discerned from a literary text, but many can, especially in the Scriptures. The Hebrew people were honest with their feelings and when something displeased them, they would not hesitate to lift their voice to God and cry out, "Why have you allowed this to happen?" Such outbursts were not disrespectful, as might be construed in a more reserved culture.

A second area of further research lies in applying speech act theory to other categories of language study. For example, a rhetorical question is an indirect speech act that can be formed when a speaker questions the truth of a proposition. The preparatory condition for an assertion is that the speaker has evidence for the truth of a proposition. By questioning the truth of a proposition, a speaker is actually making a strong negative assertion. Thus, the rhetorical question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36), is actually a negative assertion, "It will surely not profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul."

A third area of further research concerns the implications of speech act theory for translation work. Speech act theory indicates that the illocutionary force of a sentence must be retained if a sentence is to be understood. For instance, explicit performatives in a source language may be best rendered implicitly in a receptor language. For example, Luke 14:18*b* reads, ἔρωτῶ σε, ἔχε με παρητημένον. The *NIV* translation, "Please excuse me," accurately renders the illocutionary force of the sentence without explicitly translating every lexical item from the source language.

Traditional grammar does not adequately explain the meaning of certain passages of Scripture. This article has demonstrated that speech act theory can lead to a better understanding of the biblical text.